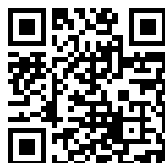

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THE
NORTH-SIDE OF THE ALTAR.

A LITURGICAL ESSAY.

BY
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"It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve
tables."—Acts vi. 2.

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THE NORTH-SIDE OF THE ALTAR.

THERE is one piece of ritual the observance of which draws a bold line of distinction between two great bodies in the Church of England. On the one side are ranked the Puritan, the Broad Church, the Establishmentarian, and the "High and Dry" sections. On the other the smaller but far more vigorous and active school which still pushes on the great Catholic Revival. The point at issue between these opposing sides is the position of the chief officiant during the celebration of the Holy Communion. That position is, as all know, defined in the Common Prayer Book by the words of the introductory Rubric, "The priest standing at the North side of the Table, shall say," &c., and also by the Rubrics prefixed to certain other portions of the office, which, however, depend for their interpretation upon the meaning of this preliminary one. It has been explained in two very different ways, and the consequent ritual is very unlike in various churches. On the one hand, the great majority of clergymen assume that "North side" and "North end" mean the same thing, and accordingly place themselves between the North wall of the Chancel and the Altar, looking South, and with the right shoulder turned towards the congregation. On the other, the ritual

minority take their stand at the West side of the Altar, facing East, and turning their backs on the congregation, standing, however, at that part of the West side which is nearest to the North, in what would, in short, speaking in terms of the compass, be the N.W. by W. point.

At the outset it is desirable to point out that the difference in question is unlike many other ceremonial variations, in that considerable stress is laid on it by each side. A ritualist, for example, would not attach much importance to the omission of turning to the East at the Creed, if he found himself in a place of worship where the custom does not prevail, nor would an anti-ceremonialist, if not exceptionally scrupulous, hesitate to comply with so harmless a custom where he found it in use. But the matter of the position of the priest at the Altar is one in which neither will make concessions. It is very seldom that an accomplished ritualist is permitted to celebrate in a non-ritual church, but every one has seen the manner in which strange celebrants, episcopal and others, deliberately ignore and set at naught the Use of some churches where they chance to officiate, how they drag the desk from its appointed place, and balance themselves painfully upon the narrow projection of the footpace at the North End, indifferent to the irritation they well know themselves to be exciting by their departure from local custom, so long as they can adhere to their cherished tradition.

If the *argumentum ad verecundiam* were one of much weight in the present day, it would be sufficient to point out that on the one side are ranged all those persons who accept in its fulness the language of the primitive Liturgies and the ancient Fathers touching the Holy Eucharist, who are competent, after long

study, to pronounce with some degree of authority on the meaning of Rubrics, and who have shewn themselves, by diligent use, the most faithful adherents of the Book of Common Prayer. When on the other side are found ranked together all those whose Eucharistic teaching is, to say no more, entirely modern, and all those who agitate for more or less sweeping alterations in the Anglican formularies, whilst possessing a most imperfect acquaintance with liturgiology and exhibiting a very modified respect for rubrics or canons, it would seem that those pious and conscientious people who are anxious to do exactly what is right and lawful need not hesitate for a moment in making their choice. But as they confessedly do hesitate, and in the mean time for the most part comply with the non-ritual use of the North End, it is desirable to adduce the reasons which make that custom untenable.

I. In commencing, then, two facts must be carefully borne in mind. First, that the early Christian Liturgies, inclusive of the Petrine or Roman family, borrow largely, almost entirely, from Jewish prayers and ceremonies. Second, that the Anglican Prayer Book is a *new edition* of Roman Offices, not a new work. Therefore, when we find a difficulty in explaining the meaning or origin of a phrase or rite in the Common Prayer, we must refer to the Missal and Breviary, and where these fail us, we must look to the Pentateuch, the Talmud, and the Rabbis of the Synagogue for information, exactly as geographical explorers act when searching for the well-head of a river.

The position of the officiating priest in the ancient Christian Church, as well as the site of the Christian Altar, depended on Hebrew precedent, and the same is true of Anglican ritual in relation to Latin customs.

Many disputes, however, have been raised by controversialists, who admit the first of these main facts, as to whether the Temple or the Synagogue formed the model of the Church, and, in the former case, whether the Altar of Burnt-offering, the Altar of Incense, or the Table of Shew-bread was the type of the Christian Altar. I do not propose to enter at present into this discussion, though I may record my own belief that the Temple and the Altar of Incense are the true answers, but I propose to prove that, whichever view is adopted, the bearing on the main question now at issue is the same, since in every instance the position of the priest was normally in front of the Altar or Table at which he officiated.

a. The Altar of Burnt-offering had a broad red line drawn across the midst of the front to mark the heights at which different blood-sprinklings were to be made. It is sufficiently obvious that unless the priest faced this line he could not perform the rite accurately.*

b. The Altar of Incense, standing, as it did, in the Holy Place, just outside the Veil, was emphatically the place for "offering before the Lord,"† i. e., in front of the hidden Mercy-Seat, above which hovered the Shechinah.‡ To stand beside or behind the Altar would have done away at once with the mystic symbolism of the act.

c. The table of Shew-bread stood, like the Altar of Incense, in the Holy Place, and so far as we can gather, on a line with it, equally distant from the Veil, and balanced by the Sevenfold Candlestick. Exactly the same ritual language is used of the act of placing the

* Lightfoot, Temple Service, VIII. 1. vi.

† Exod. xxx. 8; Levit. iv. 7; 1 Chron. xxiii. 13.

‡ Freeman, Princ. of Div. Serv. Part II. p. 169.

loaves upon it as of offering the incense, *i. e.*, "before the LORD,"* and therefore the same argument holds good.

d. Reference to the Synagogue, rather than the Temple, will not alter the nature of Jewish precedent, since the rule observed from the time of the First Captivity seems always to have been to place the Ark of the Law on a table raised on a platform, which platform must be close to that wall which is in the direction of Palestine (in Europe, of course, the East wall) and the presiding Rabbi utters all prayer turned in that direction, with his back to the congregation.† Therefore, if the Holy Eucharist be regarded as the Christian equivalent for the Mosaic sacrifices, or even as a memorial of such an equivalent, we should naturally expect to see this gesture repeated in the Catholic Liturgies, either by formal prescription or traditional use. But as there is a section of Christians, happily not intellectually or numerically powerful in the Anglican Church, which insists on regarding the Holy Eucharist as a bare commemoration of the Passover Supper, to be illustrated only from private household customs, and not from public worship, it is as well to meet their objections. According to their theory, the Holy Communion is only a Meal, a solemn one indeed, but in no sense, save as a distant metaphor, a Sacrifice. The celebrant will, in this case, represent the Divine Host, and occupy His place at the guest-table, taking, like all other hosts, the head of it, which is obviously one end, if we go by modern usage. This theory might be dismissed at once, so far as we are concerned, by the rubric which enjoins communicants to kneel, and not to sit, but it will be more satisfactorily disposed of by reference to the an-

* Ex. xxv. 30; Lev. xxiv. 3, 6, 8.

† Vitringa, *De Synagog. Vet.* I. 1. viii.

cient and modern order of the Paschal Supper of the Jews. The master of the household then, as now, certainly occupied the chief place, but that place neither was nor is what we call the "head of the table." It was that central place which we still see occupied at the high tables of colleges by the president of the day, and the Paschal dishes are laid in the middle of the table close to the host, and not at the end.* Leonardo da Vinci's famous "Last Supper" supplies a familiar illustration. A plea may hence be derived for standing between the East wall and the Altar, facing the people, but none for going to the North End.

II. It is now time to proceed to the second stage of the argument, and to shew from ancient sources what the attitude of Christian priests was in early days, and how far it agreed with the Jewish use.

To begin with the Altar itself, it should be observed that much ingenuity and cumbrous learning was employed in Laudian days to prove, on the High Church side, that the Altar was always close to the East Wall, and irremovable; on the Puritan part, that it stood so as to admit of being surrounded, and even of being shifted if needful. Both sides were partially right, for we find two distinct types of churches co-existing from the earliest times, (a) the Catacumbal form, (b) the Basilican.

In the Catacombs the Altar was usually the slab over the tomb of a Martyr, fastened to the wall of a shallow arched recess, with no passage behind it, and very little projection at the ends. In such a case, and in that of the countless churches built in early days on the same model, it was physically impossible for the priest to stand anywhere save in front of the Altar, with his back to the

* Lightfoot, Temple Service; Pedahzhur, Prayers of the Jews.

people. The Basilican churches, usually the cathedrals of the bishops, were differently constructed. Their Eastern End terminated in a semi-circular apse, all round which ran seats for the diocesan clergy, on each side of the Episcopal throne. In the midst of the apse, and sometimes on the chord of the arc, stood the Altar, fenced towards the West by rails,* and surmounted by a canopy on pillars, commonly called a *Ciborium*, the modern *Baldachin*, barring access for ritual purposes on the North and South, but permitting approach to the Eastern and Western sides. The Altar might thus be circled about in procession, as it is to the present day on certain occasions in the Eastern Church, but its ends could not be used conveniently by priest or people. In churches thus built, it was anciently, and perhaps universally, the custom for the bishop or priest to celebrate standing at the Eastern side, with his back to the throne, and his face to the people, a custom which nearly died out in the West in the thirteenth century,† though it may still be seen at the High Altar of the chief cathedral of Western Christendom, S. John Lateran, as well as in some three or four other Italian churches.‡ In the East no trace of it has existed for many centuries, and for my own part, I very much doubt it having ever prevailed in ordinary parish churches, where there was no Bishop's throne, since it hardly accords with the practice of praying towards the East, incontestably general in the second century, and presumably so in the first. In any case, the rule for the Communion was for the clergy to come from their places in the apse up to the Altar itself, while the laity, to whom the Sanctuary was forbidden ground, ad-

* Euseb. Eccl. Hist. X. 4. † Durandus, Rat. Div. Off. V. 2.

‡ Pelliccia, Eccl. Christ. Pol. I. 2. X. 13.

vanced only to the Western rails.* A third, but far rarer arrangement, was that seen in circular churches, where the Altar stood in the centre, fenced, however, as before, with rails, and surmounted by a canopy, often with curtains falling at the ends, leaving only the East and West sides visible.

There is, in the primitive Liturgies, no hint whatsoever which can lead to the belief that the ends of the Altar were ever used ritually, while there are many rubrics and directions absolutely inconsistent with any such idea. The one exception, if it be an exception, of which I am aware, is found in the Ambrosian rite, according to which the deacon and sub-deacon may happen to be placed at the North and South ends, while the priest is invariably at the West side.

III. It is needless to trace the position of the priest through the course of centuries, and I shall come at once to the Pre-Reformation Uses of England, citing the necessary rubrics.

a. Hereford Missal. "At the Introit of the Mass, the priest, after vesting in amice and alb, standing before the Altar (*ante Altare*) shall begin the Antiphon." †

b. Sarum Missal. The priest is to go with his ministers to the Altar-step (*ad gradum Altaris*) . . . the deacon assisting on his right and the sub-deacon on his left." . . .

c. York Missal. "The priest, going in up to the Altar, (*introiens ad Altare*) . . . shall say." . . .

The Hereford Missal goes on to direct the priest to make the confession "before the Altar-step," and to ascend the step after the absolution. The York rubrics are similar.

After the priest gives the kiss of peace to the deacon and sub-deacon, the Sarum Rubric continues,

* Conc. Tolet. IV. 17: † Maskell, Anc. Lit.

“ Then the priest shall go up to the Altar (*accedat ad Altare*) and at the midst of the Altar shall say . . . “ *Let us pray.*”

Then succeeds the censuring of the Altar, after which Sarum, Bangor, York, and Hereford uses direct the priest to go to the right corner of the Altar (*dextrum cornu*) until the *Gloria in Excelsis*, when he returns to the middle.

Next, he turns round to the people, saying “ Let us pray,” then commencing the Collect, which is duly followed by the Epistle and Gospel. Before the latter is read, the deacon bows to the priest who stands before the Altar (*humilians se ad sacerdotem stantem coram Altari*) and asks his blessing. The Gospel ended, the priest again stands *in medio Altaris* for the Creed, and remains there until the washing of his hands, which he does at the right corner, returning thence to the centre, continuing there till he has finished his own communion, after which he goes once more to the right corner for the ablutions of the chalice, which, according to Hereford Use, and apparently the others also, he swallows at the middle of the Altar, going again to the right corner to say the “ Communion and Post-communion,” and at last turning to the people for the dismissal.

From all these particulars it is clear that the Pre-Reformation Uses of England recognized three principal positions, and three only, for the celebrant, the midst of the step below the Altar, the right corner of the Altar, and the centre of it.

The English Altars followed the Catacumbal type, and having usually a reredos or retable behind them, (when they were not actually affixed to the wall), and always a cross and candles, they could be approached for ritual purposes from the West side alone, thus keep-

ing to one only of the two great pieces of symbolism intended by the posture of the priest. For the celebrant, especially when a Bishop, attended by a semicircle of clergy, and officiating with his face turned towards the people, as was the Basilican usage, typified CHRIST and the Apostles in the act of Communion, and thus showed forth that mystery to the Church on earth. On the other hand, the priest facing East, and turned away from the people, as in the ancient Jewish rites, represents CHRIST standing within the Heavenly Veil before the throne of the FATHER, pleading His death on behalf of sinners, in exact accordance with the ceremonies of the Great Day of Atonement.

Two things have to be noted before proceeding to argue from the Sarum rubrics. The "right corner" referred to does not mean that at the right hand of the celebrant, but at his left (*i.e.* the N.W. corner), since by a Papal Injunction of 1486 the terms "right and left" were applied with reference to the Crucifix over the Altar, and not to the celebrant. And in the centre of the slab of every Altar there was a small square halloved stone (*Sigillum Altaris*)* closing the aperture which contained reliques. On this stone, and at no other part of the Altar, the Act of Consecration invariably took place. †

Both these circumstances have an important bearing on what follows, and must be kept in mind. The first thing which meets us when entering upon the consideration of the Post-Reformation Use in England is the very distinct language in which the Preface to the Book of Common Prayer (and that of 1552 more than of 1549), speaks of Ceremonies.

* Lyndwood, Provinciale.

† Bened. XIV., De Sac. Missæ I. 2. ix., II. 3. viii.

The principle clearly laid down is that particular rites are abolished, curtailed, or amalgamated, for certain definite reasons, but that nothing new is introduced. It is admitted that new rites might reasonably be devised, but the fact of their actual introduction is emphatically denied. But the references given above to the customs of Jewish and Early Christian worship prove that the posture of the priest at the North End of the Altar was unknown before the Reformation, and so to have ruled it then would be to innovate upon, not to say to outrage, the traditional ceremonies of three thousand years. It would require the most positive and least ambiguous wording to justify us in supposing such to have been the intention of the compilers of the Prayer Book, since such intention would form a marked exception to the programme they had formally put forth.

What they did intend can be gathered from their rubrics and from the meaning those rubrics must have suggested to the minds of priests accustomed all their lives to the ancient ritual.

IV. To begin then with Edward's First Book of 1549 :

The Communion Office opens with that which is properly no part of the public Liturgy, but the priest's private Preparation, and the Rubric runs "The priest standing afore the midst of the Altar, shall say the Lord's Prayer with this Collect," [that for Purity]. This answers exactly to the first Hereford Rubric given above, where the celebrant at first stands *before* the Altar, *i.e.*, in front of, and below, the footpace.

Then, as in the earlier Missals, he goes *to* the Altar (*i.e.*, ascending the step, and passing up to the centre), for the *Gloria in Excelsis*. "The priest, standing at God's board shall begin, Glory be to God on high." There is no direction as to where he is to say the

Collect, but the Epistle is to be read "in a place assigned for the purpose," *i.e.*, either a lectern, or the South-West corner of the Altar. No other directions are given, save as to the priest turning towards the people and back again. Here, obviously, much is abridged from the ancient Use, but nothing before unknown is brought in.

The Book of 1552 is the first that mentions the North-side, which it does exactly in the words of the existing Rubric. The only other passages in that volume which affect the present question are the Rubrics before the Prayer of Humble Access and of Consecration, which run simply as follows: "Then shall the priest, kneeling down at God's board, say," &c., and "Then the priest standing up shall say as followeth." The Elizabethan Rubrics of 1559 are identical with these, and finally those of the last revision in 1662 introduce the following variations. 1. The priest is directed to turn to the people at the Decalogue. 2. He is to stand at the Collect where he did before the Decalogue. 3. At the Prayer of Consecration the Rubric runs "When the priest standing before the Table, hath so ordered the bread and wine, that he may with the more readiness and decency break the bread before the people, and take the cup into his hands, he shall say the Prayer of Consecration, as followeth."

Now the question to be answered first of all is "What did North-side mean?" On the hypothesis forced upon us by the Preface to the Common Prayer Book, it must have been some place ritually familiar to the Anglican Priesthood, and not a new position. Bearing in mind that almost every English church at that time was built East and West (a rule by no means so rigidly observed on the Continent) and that the Crucifix had been removed

in the majority of places, the substitution of the unambiguous words "north and south" for "right and left" seems natural, since the latter pair of words would, in the absence of the Crucifix, have to be inverted throughout, to the great confusion of celebrants.

In what other familiar language could the direction then be expressed, save North-side? Only one *side* of the Altar was accessible, the *ends* were untried regions to all English priests, and the simplest way of describing the particular part of the West side at which they were to stand was to divide that side by an imaginary line passing through its centre, and to define the portions which lay on each side of the line as severally North and South. There are two well-known examples of such language found in Eastern and Latin rites.

a. The Syriac *Ordo Communis* of the Liturgy, describing the priest's passage in front of the Altar, says "The priest comes from the North side to the South." This is just as he has made his own communion, and is about to administer to the people. * It will hardly be pretended that he came from the North End to the South End, a rite unknown even to English Puritans, not to say Eastern Christians of the fifth century.

b. The General Rubrics of the Roman Missal, describing the mode of censuring the Altar before High Mass, run thus: "Turning to the Altar, he censes its level surface (*planitiem*) or slab, in the front portion, moving the censer thrice to the middle, where, making a reverence to the Cross, he goes on to cense the other *side* of the Altar (*aliud latus Altaris*) with three motions of the censer, as far as the Gospel corner." † The *ends* and back are not censed.

* Renaudot, Liturg. Orient. II. 24, ed. 1716.

† Rit. Celeb. Missam, iv. 4.

That there was very little external difference between the English Mass of 1549 and the older rite appears from a letter of the notorious Hooper, written on Dec. 27th of that year to Henry Bullinger.* The office of 1552 still further abridged all ceremonial, but avoided newfangled innovations. By transposing the position of the *Gloria in Excelsis* to a later part of the office, it made it no longer the rule for the priest to begin the service at the midst of the Altar, and it moreover directed him to say his preparation *on* the footpace instead of *below* it, as he had done according to Sarum Use and that of 1549. There is no doubt that the Puritans availed themselves of the wording of the new Rubric, and following up Ridley's violent attack upon Altars in 1550, substituted tables for them in many places, setting these tables with their short ends East and West, instead of North and South as we have them now. Then, for the first time, there were no East and West *sides*, but only a North and a South side, the ends being transposed in position. The Puritan celebrants then placed themselves in the same part of the chancel as their representatives do now, but they did not face the same part of the Holy Table, inasmuch as they stood at the centre of one of the long sides. They never dreamt of going to the end. Of course the Romanizing clergy, who clung to their old usages, kept to the same part of the table, even when it was thus shifted, because Canon law had obliged them to consecrate on the slab in the centre, and they would naturally continue to observe that rule, whether the old Altar remained undemolished or a table were substituted for it. On the other hand, the simple question of physical convenience must have weighed considerably with their rivals; since the difficulty of

* Original Letters (Parker Society), i. 71.

handling the sacred vessels (especially if the office-book be large, and there happen to be more than one chalice and paten) is very great when one stands at the end, and has to stretch awkwardly across to reach them. But it should be observed that this change in the bearings of the Holy Table was a matter of private caprice, and never was legalized. The celebrated Rubric enjoining that the "Table shall stand in the body of the Church, or in the chancel where Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer are appointed to be said," never implied the right of removal under all circumstances, but meant only that the chancel was the regular place for the Table, save when for certain causes, the chancel could not be used. Such causes would be (a) A wall between chancel and nave, as in Arundel Church. (b) The chancel being only a mortuary chapel, blocked up with a large tomb, or more than one, impeding all view of the Altar, as in Henry VII.'s Chapel in Westminster Abbey. (c) A collegiate or cathedral church with a private choir, into which the laity did not enter, but attended services in the nave only, as may be seen now in Westminster Abbey during the special services in winter.

Thus I have seen, I think in Amiens Cathedral, a large temporary Altar erected in the nave, west of the choir-screen, on occasion of a confirmation, none of the service taking place in choir. Elizabeth's Injunctions of 1559, though allowing the Table to be moved if necessary for the convenience of the minister and the communicants, do not contemplate its removal from the chancel, and the High Church Archdeacon Pearson,* in 1639, agrees with the Latitudinarian Bishop Williams, who, three years before, specified the East end of the chancel as the most convenient place, although the two

* Visitation Articles of Suffolk.

were at issue in the matter of erecting the Holy Board altar-wise or table-wise. And indeed the Rubric of 1559, ever since continued, which enjoins that the "chancels should remain as in times past," is conclusive against any such removal, save in the beforementioned cases, when there is no ritual chancel at all, and the Eastern part of the nave has to be used for that purpose. The Puritans, on the other hand, wished to treat the Altar as an ordinary table, to be stowed away from motives of convenience in the chancel when not in use, but to be carried down to the body of the church at Communions, that the people might sit round it, and they actually did so in many cases where there was no reason for not using the chancel.

Out of this question of the removal of the Altar arose that controversy which is the classical authority for the attitude the matter assumed during the reign of Charles I. Archbishop Laud, as is well-known, set himself to fight the battle of placing the Holy Table altar-wise, fenced with rails, and won it most signally. In 1636 the Vicar of Grantham (whose Ordinary was John Williams, then Bishop of Lincoln, afterwards Archbishop of York, and Lord Keeper, Laud's great adversary), attempted to fix the Altar of his church in Laud's fashion. The churchwardens appealed to Bishop Williams, who issued a long monition to the Vicar, one paragraph of which runs thus: "This Table must not stand *Altarwise*, and you at the North end thereof, but *Tablewise*, and you must officiate at the *Northside* of the same." Hereupon, Peter Heylyn, Laud's celebrated chaplain, published in 1637 an anonymous pamphlet entitled "A Coale from the Altar," in which he stated that North side and North end meant the same thing, since in every quadrilateral figure, whether square or

oblong, and therefore in every Communion Table, "every part of it is a side; however custome hath prevailed to call the narrower sides by the name of ends. When therefore hee that ministreth at the *Altar*, stands at the *North end* of the same, as wee use to call it; hee stands no question at the North side thereof," &c. * He then alleges, with more truth, that the use of cathedrals, colleges, and chapels royal was altogether opposed to the tablewise arrangement. To this Williams replied in another anonymous pamphlet, called "Holy Table, Name and Thing," in which, despite Hooker's famous dictum, he repudiates the idea that cathedral usage is any rule for parish churches, and then proceeds to ridicule Heylyn's mathematical argument at considerable length, saying (and herein sensibly enough) that the rubrics were not meant for mathematicians but for ordinary men and women, who did not think the side of an oblong table the same thing as its end. † The author of a paper in the *Ecclesiastic* of May, 1858, on the Position of the Priest at the Altar, has before now referred to these pamphlets, but appears to lend too much credence to Williams' statement about the frequency with which the Altar-tables were set tablewise. The Bishop in fact declines to say anything as to the use of any but parish churches, and we have but little reason to suppose that he did not misrepresent that. The two points of importance are, on his side, that he utterly and contemptuously rejects Heylyn's identification of the side and end as an unheard-of novelty, and, on Heylyn's part, the absence of any attempt to prove that any one, before the present dispute, had ever thought of going to the North End at all. He does not boldly defend his interpretation as being in agreement with established

* Coale from the Altar, p. 23.

† Holy Table, pp. 49—56.

usage, but simply shelters himself under it as a legal quibble, by which he may uphold that position of the Holy Table for which Laud and he were contending.

It may appear singular, when we bear in mind the very many proofs that exist of the continuous custom of praying towards the East in use amongst Anglicans all through Tudor and Stuart days, why Laud and Heylyn did not fight both questions at once, that of placing the Table altarwise and that of officiating at the West side of it. It seems more than probable, setting aside the slender liturgical knowledge possessed by either, that they considered it most expedient to take one thing at a time, to avoid raising too great a storm, and indeed the victory of the chancel rails was only just won when the Archbishop's troubles and persecutions began. Two of his contemporaries, however, leave no doubt as to what he and they wished.

Bishop Andrewes, in his Form for the Consecration of a Church, says, "The Bishop, advancing from his Chair, kneels *before (coram)* the Holy Table." The same word is used to denote the place where the founder of the Church was to kneel in order to communicate. Bishop Wren was impeached by the Commons in 1641 for—amongst other things—"standing at the West side of the Table, with his face to the East and his back to the people."

The wording of the Scottish Prayer Book of 1637, so often and so erroneously ascribed to Laud, has been sometimes mistakenly quoted in defence of the use of the North End by English ecclesiastics. The Rubrics of that Book which affect the question are two: (a) "The holy Table . . . shall stand at the uppermost part of the Chancel or Church, where the Presbyter, standing at the North side or end thereof, shall say the Lord's

Prayer," &c. (b) "During the time of Consecration, he shall stand at such part of the Holy Table, where he may with the more ease and decency use both his hands."

It has been often alleged that the former of these two Rubrics is decisive of the identity of North side and North end. There are six objections which dispose effectually of such a theory.

1. The date of the Scottish Book (1637) is also that of Williams' pamphlet "Holy Table, Name and Thing," in which Heylyn's attempt to identify the side and end is treated as a novel quibble, a charge which the latter fails to meet in his subsequent reply entitled *Antidotum Lincolnienſe*, published late in the same year. Hence there is an *a priori* likelihood that the Scottish rubric, (which Heylyn, as Laud's intimate friend, certainly must have seen in 1636 when the draft of the Book was sent to London from Scotland,) is alternative and not explanatory.

2. There is great clumsiness in the wording of the Rubric if the Priest was meant to confine himself to the North end. For if "North side" in the English book meant "North end," and was usually so understood, there was no need of saying anything about the "end" in the Scottish book, since the old rubric would have sufficed. If the old rubric was obscure, "North end" ought to have stood alone. The two words only serve to perplex, unless they are to be taken as alternatives.

3. There are evident marks in the Scottish Prayer Book of accommodation to Puritan scruples, such as (a) the use of the word Presbyter instead of Priest; (b) the omission of all Apocryphal Lessons save two for All Saints' Day; (c) the substitution of a rubric giving the Crown and Parliament the right of settling the vestments of the clergy, instead of prescribing, like the

English Book, the pre-Reformation habits. It is reasonable to suppose that liberty to go to the North End was one of these concessions.

4. The principle on which the Scottish Book was drawn up is exactly the converse of that which animates Edward VI.'s Book of 1552. The former aimed at the gradual re-introduction of neglected ritual, the latter at the gradual discontinuance of existing ceremonies. They agree, for the most part, in not prescribing additions on the one hand or omissions on the other, and in merely suggesting either process by hints or by silence, each side hoping that its theory would prevail in the long run. The Puritans, with the liturgical ignorance and natural irreverence of the vulgar to back them, showed the clearer prescience, and the permitted neglects almost everywhere prevailed over the permitted observances. Thus the Book of 1552, by merely saying nothing about the Mixed Chalice, succeeded in almost banishing that use, while the Book of 1637 did not fully establish the custom of consecrating in front of the Altar, although there is no doubt that it designed to recommend that practice, while deeming it judicious not to say so in definite terms.

5. As a matter of historical fact, the two usages of going to the North end and to the North side at the beginning of the Communion Office are found co-existing in the Scottish Church at intervals from the seventeenth century to the present day, a circumstance inexplicable on any theory of interpretation save the alternative.

6. One of the three English revisers of the Scottish Book was that very Bishop Wren who, as we have seen, did not go to the North end himself, and cannot be supposed to have wished others to do so.

It has been objected, in the case of both Wren and

Laud, that they put their practice in the matter of celebrations on the lowest ground of physical convenience, when assailed on the subject, and said nothing at all about ritual propriety. We, who in our own day, have known lights on the Altar excused on the ground of the darkness of a chancel, need feel no surprise at their employing the only argument to which their adversaries would condescend to listen.

I do not seek to deny that the posture of the priest looking South, with his right side towards the people, was frequent enough in the seventeenth century, but documentary evidence shews that the Puritans who stood so, always sought to have the Altar set tablewise, so that they stood at the proper part of it, and that the Church party, which was more eager in defending the position of the Altar than that of the priest, went to the North end, when it did so, as a compromise, and not from any conviction that such was the prescribed attitude. In fact, its leaders were afraid of doing too much at a time, with somewhat of the same unreasonable and unreasoning timidity which makes so many of their modern successors shrink from adopting the legal Eucharistic vestments, while professing fulness of teaching and sympathy with ritual, and that too when ministering to congregations whose wishes are altogether on the same side. But no one is entitled to argue from such a fact that the surplice and hood are the proper and authorized habits for the celebrant at Holy Communion. The last evidence worth citing before we come to the Prayer Book of 1662 is the frontispiece to Bishop Sparrow's *Rationale upon the Book of Common Prayer*, 1657, which shews the Altar-book lying open near the centre of the slab, and not so much as near the North end. This is while the priest is say-

ing the Litany, and points out the part of the Altar to which he was to go as soon as he had finished the earlier service.

The key to the principle which actuated the Revisers of 1661 in the matter of the posture of the priest is the reply of the Bishops to the demand of the Puritans that the minister should always face the people during prayer. It is as follows: "The minister's turning to the people is not most convenient throughout the whole ministration. When he speaks to them, as in Lessons, Absolution, and Benedictions, it is convenient that he turn to them. When he speaks for them to God, it is fit that they should all turn another way, as the ancient Church ever did."* And indeed John Cosin, Bishop of Durham, the chief of the Revisers, had himself been impeached twenty years before for celebrating the Holy Eucharist with his back to the people,† and we know that his views had undergone no modification in the interval.

The first thing to be noted is, that having the Scottish Book of 1637 before them, the Revisers did not import the term "North-end" from its rubrics, which they might fairly be expected to have done if they wished to recommend that point, or even to retain the alternative. Next, that the direction for the priest to turn to the people at the Decalogue is new, implying that he has been turning away from them previously, exactly as suggested by the Bishops' reply, but by no means fitting in with the attitude of "shouldering" them, which is adopted when the priest looks South and they East. The same remark holds good of the rubrics to the Absolution and to the Preface, which direct him first to turn to the people, and then back to the Table.

* Cardwell, *Hist. of Conf.* p. 353.

† Superstitious Innovations at Durham, p. 26.

The full awkwardness of the North end is best seen when a celebrant, standing there, turns to the East at the Creed, ignoring the whole symbolism of the position of the Altar in the central Eastern point.

Next comes the famous rubric before the Consecration Prayer, obviously drawn from the Book of 1637.

Scarcely any paragraph in the Prayer Book has been more misconstrued and depraved through sheer ignorance of liturgiology. It is needful to cite it at length in order to consider its parts successively.

“When the priest, standing before the Table, hath so ordered the Bread and Wine, that he may with the more readiness and decency break the Bread before the people, and take the Cup into his hands, he shall say the Prayer of Consecration, as followeth.” The first common error of interpretation is mistaking the emphatic word in the first paragraph, which is not “before,” but “standing.” The priest has just been *kneeling*, to say the Prayer of Humble Access, and must now rise. But if we are to attach any weight to the Bishops’ answer about the position of the minister and to Cosin’s authority, we must perforce hold that he was already before the Altar during the “We do not presume.” Secondly, “ordered the Bread and Wine” has been explained to mean removing them from the centre of the slab to the North end. But why should they be put in the centre at all if they are to stay there only the few minutes between the Offertory and the Canon? Why not put them at the North end to begin with? In fact, the common, nay the universal, practice of placing the chalice and paten in the middle of the Altar, even in churches so unrubrical as to put the Bread and Wine there ready before service, is a most forcible argument against the use of the North end.

What "ordering" means is very simple. It implies (a) diminishing the quantity of bread offered, in proportion to the number of intending communicants, which was ascertained by their coming up into the chancel, or at any rate to the front seats of the nave, at the invitation "Draw near with faith," &c., and (b) pouring wine into the chalice from the flagon or stoup, which was not always done at the offertory. Thirdly, some persons, and amongst them the late Professor Blunt, have singularly imagined the phrase "hath so ordered," &c., to imply such to be the sole reason for standing before the Table at all, and that, so soon as the paten and chalice have been removed to the North end, the priest should return thither, and there say the Prayer of Consecration. It is enough to reply that such interpretation would require a special and definite rubric, inasmuch as it involves a complete change of posture, and no such rubric is in existence. In fact the words "more readiness and decency" are the correlatives of the Scottish rubric "such a part of the Holy Table, where he may with the more ease and decency use both his hands." Now nothing is more obvious than that, if there were no party question at stake, every one would acknowledge that there is more "readiness and decency" possible for the priest when handling the sacred vessels at the middle of the Altar, than when sprawling across a quarto or folio office-book from the North end, especially if, as often happens on great public occasions, there is more than one set of vessels in use at a time. Every such vessel must, by rubric, be touched by the consecrating priest, but his position often makes the act of reaching them an unseemly physical struggle. No one would use the sideboard of a dining-room in such a fashion, unless desirous of forfeiting all character for ordinary good manners.

Lastly, the words "before the people" have been alleged to be opposed to the attitude of the priest celebrating with his back to them, inasmuch as the phrase implies a distinct sight of the whole ceremony on the part of the congregation. The argument might be retorted, for the priest is more conspicuous at the centre of the Altar than at the end, but it is in fact worth nothing. There is no authoritative Latin version of the Book of 1662, but J. D[uport]'s long popular translation, dated 1670, renders the words "*Coram populo*," signifying no more than that a congregation must be present, *i. e.*, that there is not to be a Private Mass.* With the full knowledge which we have of the fact that the Rubric was specially directed against Puritan innovators, it is not a little curious to see it pressed into their service.

There are not wanting testimonies in the eighteenth century of the continuance of the Catholic usage.

First comes the Frontispiece to a "Form of Prayers used by King William III. when he received the Sacrament," 1704. Here the King kneels before the Altar, in the midst of which stand the chalice and paten, the latter with bread upon it. A bishop, the celebrant, stands at the North side, not at the *end*, turning half-round to the King, and holding a book in his hand.

Next comes an important gloss, in the shape of a Rubric prefixed to the Nonjuring Liturgy of 1718. "Note, that whenever in this Office the priest is directed to *turn to the Altar*, or to stand or kneel *before it*, or *with his face towards it*, it is always meant that he should stand or kneel *on the north side thereof*." This Rubric seems absolutely conclusive as to the meaning attached in 1718 to the North side, since the term

* Jebb's Choral Service, p. 509.

“before the Altar” is clearly incompatible with going to the North end.

Thirdly, a strong argument is found in the Rubrics for the Coronation of George II. and Queen Caroline in 1727. I shall pass over them, and will take instead a little later the Rubrics for Queen Victoria in 1838 as some confusion of statement arises out of the double crowning in the earlier service.

We know practically less of the details of Anglican ritual in the Georgian Era than we do of the Greek ceremonial in the time of Constantine the Great, but it may be remarked that in a very considerable number of churches built in the beginning and middle of the last century the Altars are so constructed with projecting pilasters or columns at their sides as to be inaccessible save from the West, particularly as they are often fastened to the East wall. It is simply impracticable to celebrate at the North end, and even in non-ritual days such a deliberate flying in face of a rubric enjoining the priest to go to the end is not to be looked for ; a tolerably clear proof that neither architects nor clergy were aware, any more than I am, of the existence of such an injunction in the English Church.

There can be little doubt, from what we know of the higher clergy of the last century, from the numerous reliques of ancient usage which still locally survive, and from the analogy of civil life, that Divine Service was performed, except in grossly neglected parishes, with a certain stateliness and dignity, and with ritual which, if not accurate, was at any rate not meagre. The unlettered impatience of the second generation of Evangelicals swept away many ceremonial usages which subsisted in their day, and forced the leaders of the Revival to begin with smaller store, than their grandsires

had possessed, and there seems good reason for attributing the present common use of the North End to the same spirit which has relegated Baptism to the rank of a private office, and invented Evening Communion.

Coming at length to our own times, the Coronation Office, as last used in 1838, shows that "North Side" is a liturgical term, and not as Heylyn thought, a mathematical one, nor yet, as Williams held, a merely popular expression.

a. The First Oblation. "The Archbishop goeth to the Altar, and puts on his cope, and standeth on the North side of it, . . . which being done, the Queen . . . goes down to the Altar, and kneeling upon the steps of it, makes her first oblations . . . delivers them to the Archbishop, and the Archbishop standing (in which posture he is to receive all other oblations) receives from her, . . . to be reverently laid upon the Altar." Here it is plain that the Archbishop is not at the North end, because then he would be too far off from the kneeling Queen. But if at the North-West side, there he can, without change of posture, receive her offerings.

b. The Sermon. "One of the bishops is ready in the pulpit, placed against the pillar at the *North East corner* of the theatre [*i.e.* that part of the Abbey where the ceremony takes place] and begins the sermon, which the Queen hears sitting in her chair on the *South side* of the Altar, over against the pulpit." If the Queen were at the *South end* of the Altar, she could not be opposite a N.E. pillar. She must have been at the S.W., a good way from the end. And so indeed the conclusion of this rubric shows plainly. "On the *South side, East of the Queen's chair, nearer to the Altar*, stand the Dean and Prebendaries of Westminster." If the South side meant the South end, the Queen's chair would

be as far East as it could go, and no one could be nearer to the Altar than she, except by going *North* of her chair.

c. The Anointing. "The Queen will then sit down in King Edward's chair placed in the midst of the area over against the Altar, with a faldstool before it, . . . and the Queen kneeleth down at the faldstool, and the Archbishop standing on the *North side* of the Altar, saith this prayer or blessing *over* her." How *over* her, if she be in the *middle*, and he at the *end*? Whereas if the Primate's place be just a little on the North of an imaginary line passing through the middle of the Altar, the rubric is plain enough. This completes the chain of evidence as to the meaning of the North side, and carries the tradition down through the course of fourteen hundred years. I will conclude by summing up the result of the previous investigations in a few brief propositions.

I. The attitude of going to the North end of the Altar was unknown throughout the three thousand years of Mosaic and ancient Christian ceremonial.

II. Christian priests celebrated the Holy Eucharist either with their backs to the people, turning East, or (in Basilican churches,) with their faces to them, looking West.

III. The Basilican arrangement never prevailed in England, and is opposed to our present rubrics, which imply that when the priest turns *to* the Altar, he turns *from* the congregation, so that the Catacumbal type alone is usual.

IV. The several editions of the Prayer Book were drawn up on the principle of not innovating, by bringing in new ritual, but of merely abridging the old ceremonies.

V. North-side is shewn in A.D. 400, 1637, 1657, 1704, 1718, and 1838 not to mean North end.

VI. The universal reception in the English Church of the Laudian arrangement of Chancels and Altars makes it impracticable to go to the N.E. side of the Holy Table, so that North-side is limited to meaning the North part of the West side.

VII. The use of the North end is incompatible (*a*) with physical convenience, (*b*) with ancient precedent, (*c*) with the plain meaning of words, (*d*) with the known wishes and practice of the compilers of the last edition of the Prayer Book, (*e*) with any attempt to "shew forth" in solemn action either the Last Supper or the Crucifixion.

VIII. It is, finally, found wherever the supernatural character of the Holy Eucharist is denied, and where the decencies of Divine Service are disregarded, and needs, to reverent minds, no other disproof than that most weighty fact.

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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